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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

SP - 54/77
7 March 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: Admiral Turner
THROUGH: Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence
FROM: National Intelligence Officer for Strategic Programs
SUBJECT: What Role Should Intelligence Play in US-Soviet Net Assessments?

Summary

This memorandum responds to your request for comments on the conduct of US-Soviet net assessments by the Intelligence Community. It distinguishes among types of net assessments, which can range from simple one-on-one analyses of weapon systems to comprehensive assessments of the US-Soviet military balance and even of the total US-Soviet "correlation of forces," both military and non-military. It reports the mixed reaction which consumers have had to the limited net assessments which have appeared in NIEs and other intelligence issuances. In paragraph 8, it discusses the pros and cons of focusing the management of national net assessments in the Intelligence Community. Finally, noting Mr. Bush's position that the DCI should support the establishment of a national-level net assessment mechanism, it recommends that you support the procedures the NSC has adopted for conducting net assessments in PRM-10, but warns that extensive intelligence support for such studies will further tax our already-strained analytical resources.

Background

1. National Intelligence Estimates and single-agency intelligence studies have often made comprehensive net assessments of the relative capabilities of various pairs and groups of third countries, such as India and Pakistan, North and South Korea, Greece and Turkey, and the Middle Eastern countries. In these studies, the military and sometimes other aspects of the local balances

NOTE: This memorandum has been coordinated with the NIOs for the USSR and Conventional Forces, and with representatives of the Directorate of Intelligence 25X1 and the Intelligence Community Staff.

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have been set forth very explicitly, the options available to both sides have been examined, and in some cases future balances as much as five years ahead have been forecast. Such net assessments, which do not involve US capabilities and options, are widely regarded as useful and proper Intelligence undertakings. With respect to intelligence issuances on the USSR, there has been a trend toward making more detailed net assessments about some aspects of US and Soviet military forces, but the evolution has not proceeded as far as making explicit, comprehensive net assessments to measure such things as the overall US-Soviet military balance. Both philosophical and practical questions have been raised about the extent to which Intelligence should conduct US-Soviet net assessments.

2. For the most part, limited US-Soviet net assessments have been conducted by Intelligence in order to assist us in evaluating Soviet objectives and perceptions and predicting the trends in Soviet forces and their capabilities. To make these judgments, we have had to be cognizant of the US forces and capabilities against which the Soviets are competing. During the 1950s and 1960s, our cognizance of the US side was largely implicit in our estimates about Soviet forces, but recently it has been made more explicit, particularly in NIEs on Soviet strategic forces. Partly this has been a response to Nixon Administration demands that NIEs contain much more detail about the evidential and analytical bases of our judgments. Partly it has resulted from recognition by intelligence officers that an understanding of the implications of Soviet forces requires at least some net assessment; projections of Soviet forces tend to be sterile unless the reader of an estimate is also informed about how the trends would affect Soviet capabilities against the USSR's primary adversary, the US. Partly it is because a growing number of questions put to Intelligence by the Congress are about comparative US-Soviet capabilities.

3. The reaction to more explicit US-Soviet net assessments in Intelligence studies has been mixed. Dr. Schlesinger, who was responsible for setting up a small Strategic Evaluation Center in CIA to perform net assessments and related studies, continued to encourage this aspect of CIA's work when he was Secretary of Defense, although for practical reasons he counselled against getting into what he called the "farther reaches of wargaming." Congressional pressures for Intelligence to do US-Soviet net assessments have mounted, although precisely what Congress has in mind is not clear. On the other hand the PFIAB, in commenting on the NIEs of 1974 and 1975, criticized us for making judgments about the future strategic balance which gave the appearance of comprehensive net assessments when in truth the Blue side aspects had been explored only partially and inadequately. Dr. Pipes' "B" Team levied the same charge last year. Also last year, the Air Force intelligence chief dissented from part of NIE 11-3/8-76 on the grounds that the limited analysis of the interaction of US and Soviet offensive forces which it contained was oversimplified and therefore misleading.

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What Intelligence Has Done

4. US-Soviet net assessments can take a number of different forms, depending on their comprehensiveness, complexity and purpose. While they can be categorized in different ways, inevitably with some overlap, the following are representative types of net assessments which can be made about the US and USSR:

a. One-on-one analyses of weapon systems. An example is the range at which a certain Soviet SAM could engage a B-52. Such assessments are used to judge Soviet weapons capabilities in the real world, and to predict Soviet technical requirements. We also regularly make net technical assessments, i.e., comparisons of Soviet and US capabilities in a wide variety of technologies.

b. Force interaction analyses. These can be limited to a single function or can extend to the overall capabilities of a major force component. For example, the capabilities of the Soviet ICBM force to destroy US Minuteman silos is a limited force interaction analysis. More extensive interaction analyses would include, for example, the capabilities of the entire Soviet air defense system to degrade a mixed US retaliatory force of bombers, SRAMs, and cruise missiles. Force interaction analyses are often highly dependent on tactical and operational details of US and Soviet planning and execution. They are more readily done for strategic force components than for conventional forces, because the latter are more complicated, involve broader geographic considerations, and can be affected by the forces and actions of Allies and adherents on both sides.

c. Comprehensive assessments of the US-Soviet military balance. For example, the relative capabilities of the two sides to damage each other in full-scale or limited intercontinental nuclear war ten years hence. Such analyses are highly dependent on scenarios for war initiation and prosecution, and are also highly dependent on what each side does in the intervening years. A fully integrated and explicit analysis of all military forces, missions, and objectives on both sides would severely tax the capacity of any single study or study group.

d. Comprehensive assessments of the total "correlation of forces," including all military and non-military aspects of national power. These are highly judgmental and dependent on perceptions on both sides. Like category (c) above, they could be monumental in scope and could be even more taxing.

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5. Informed judgments in all four of these categories are necessary in making intelligence estimates on matters involving the US and the USSR, but assessments tend to be done less rigorously and less explicitly as we go up the scale from (a) to (d). In most such "netting," implicit or explicit, the objective of Intelligence has been to evaluate Soviet rather than US options and to articulate Soviet rather than US abilities to carry out national or military objectives. In all cases, the US-Soviet net assessments which have been made explicit in NIEs and CIA studies have been relatively simple and limited in nature. We have attempted in such assessments to illustrate the significance of trends in Soviet capabilities by studying force performance under tightly-constrained conditions which minimized the variables and did not necessarily reflect the results of an actual two-sided conflict. We have tended to avoid exploring alternative US options, because that would have intruded us into the policymaking field. We have been unable to conduct extended force interaction analyses in areas where the results would be highly dependent on US operational plans and tactics, because of our limited expertise and in some cases because we lacked access to the data.

6. Intelligence continues to participate by invitation in a variety of US-Soviet net assessments conducted by the DoD. CIA is actively involved in a current net assessment of command, control and communications, DIA has recently been participating in studies of US bomber and ASM options, and the DCI was represented in the NSSM 246 review of US defense posture last year. The office of the Secretary of Defense has the responsibility for national net assessments; its work includes, for example, the C3 study referred to above. In general, however, the DoD approach to net assessments has become fragmented since the departure of Hitch and Enthoven from the Pentagon. There has been no active, NSC-level net assessment machinery for many years.

Pros and Cons of Greater Intelligence Involvement

7. A related issue is whether Intelligence should seek to conduct more comprehensive, explicit net assessments of the US-Soviet balance to assist it in performing its intelligence mission, or to provide a service of common concern to the Government as a whole, or both. That there is a need for some better mechanism for conducting such assessments seems clear from the difficulties we have had with NIEs in the past few years and from the difficulties the DoD had in the NSSM 246 study last fall. The Carter Administration's initiative in promptly beginning a new PRM-10 on both the military and the overall US-Soviet balance may effectively meet this need, but it is quite possible that this PRM will suffer from the absence of an established, functioning mechanism for net assessment.

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8. The advantages of focussing the management of net assessments in Intelligence would be:

a. Such assessments, if conducted by CIA, would be regarded by many consumers as having been conducted by professionals who have no particular policy preference as to the outcome, or as to the US courses of action the assessments might imply.

b. The conduct of such assessments would enable Intelligence to respond more confidently and professionally to the kinds of questions that are being asked increasingly by consumers.

The principal disadvantages would be:

a. By conducting comprehensive net assessments, Intelligence would be seen by some to be intruding into the policymaking process by evaluating US options rather than sticking to the business of foreign intelligence analysis.

b. A major effort in this field by Intelligence would present difficulties of execution because of problems of access to the necessary resources and expertise, and in some cases because of lack of access to US operational data.

c. While some consumers would have confidence in the objectivity of Intelligence, others would not. The effect could be to introduce additional controversy into intelligence estimating, with a damaging spillover into areas of analysis not involving net assessments.

9. At the very end of his tenure as DCI, Mr. Bush addressed the question of comprehensive US-Soviet net assessments in a memorandum to the PFIAB. He was responding to the Pipes Team critique of intelligence estimates, and reflecting as well a survey of national foreign intelligence production which had been compiled by the IC Staff. Bush said he would object to assigning to Intelligence the responsibility for full net assessments of the US-Soviet strategic balance or of the balance in other situations involving US and foreign forces. He believed that such an arrangement would give excessive responsibility to Intelligence and would be unlikely to promote the cooperation of policymaking departments whose participation would be essential. However, Bush said he hoped his successor would encourage officials of the new

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Administration to identify a national net assessment mechanism--perhaps at the NSC Staff level--and would pledge the Intelligence Community to cooperate by providing the intelligence data and insights necessary for its operation.

10. Regardless of the management focus, a more active, continuing mechanism for comprehensive net assessments in the Government would require extensive Intelligence participation, and this participation should be a responsibility of the DCI. In this way any net assessments would include the best available Red side data, would reflect the uncertainties and differences about such data that had been surfaced within the Intelligence Community, and would include judgments about Soviet perceptions and objectives as estimated by CIA as well as the service intelligence agencies. Active participation by Intelligence in net assessments would also enable Intelligence better to appreciate the US side of the equation, and hence to identify the Soviet options which are most significant to US security interests. It should be noted, however, that requirements for intelligence support to an expanded national net assessments program would put still greater demands on our limited analytical resources, which are already strained.

11. Meanwhile, the management focus which the NSC has selected for the net assessments in PRM-10 should be given a chance. The plan for this PRM involves the active participation of Intelligence via DCI representation, management of the purely military aspects of the assessments by DoD, management of the broader "correlation of forces" assessments by the NSC Staff, and overall review responsibility by the NSC itself. Throughout this process, we should be looking for lessons on how to put this approach on an effective and durable basis.



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